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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1251
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3292
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2678
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SUBJECT: GENERATORS FOR KYRGYZSTAN: THANKS, CAN WE HAVE
SOME MORE?

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: With Kyrgyzstan facing rolling blackouts this winter due to low water levels in the main hydropower reservoir, USAID has provided back-up generators to 58 hospitals throughout the country. On February 18-19, Poloff and USAID FSN visited the Talas region to inspect the installation of generators at four hospitals and to conduct a ribbon-cutting ceremony aimed at solidifying the local government's commitment to maintaining the generators. We found the generators present, installed, and in use, but concerns regarding security and administrative control may inhibit their full effectiveness. END SUMMARY.

Background: Where is Talas?

¶2. (SBU) Talas Oblast is in the northwest of Kyrgyzstan, bordering Kazakhstan. In good weather, Talas city is only a five-hour drive through the Ala-Too mountains from Bishkek. But in bad weather, the internal route's two passes of 3600 and 3300 meters are often blocked by snow, leaving only a route through Kazakhstan as a means of communication with the capital. Talas's geographic openness to Kazakhstan, and its tenuous connection to the rest of Kyrgyzstan, is one factor behind this region's strong cultural affinity with Kazakhstan. Unlike the Kyrgyz regions bordering Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and China, one rarely hears residents express concern about the influence of their neighbor. Instead, the more common complaint is that the educated professionals of Talas are all working in Kazakhstan -- in some cases, commuting across the border on a daily basis. To all appearances, the border is more administrative than cultural.

Generators: Too Nice to Use?

¶3. (SBU) Poloff and USAID FSN visited Talas oblast to inspect the installation of USAID-provided generators at four hospitals, and to conduct a ribbon-cutting ceremony aimed at

solidifying the local government's commitment to maintaining the generators. (Note: With Kyrgyzstan experiencing periodic power cuts this winter, USAID provided 59 generators in January to 58 hospitals throughout Kyrgyzstan to help them maintain medical services during power outages. End note.) In pleasant contrast to Poloff's dark and frigid hotel room, the Talas hospitals were warm, clean, and well-lit, although their physical plants were generally deteriorating. Poloff and FSN viewed limited portions of the hospitals, and little modern technology was in evidence -- Poloff did not observe a single computer in any hospital office.

14. (SBU) Owing to the relatively mild winter, and the priority given to hospitals in energy outages, the hospitals reported minimal generator use, ranging from zero to 20 hours over the past month. Three out of the four hospitals had the generator set to turn on automatically when the power went out, and reported no problems. At the fourth hospital, the administrator told us that fuel was too expensive to run the generator every time the power went out, so the hospital staff had to call the hospital electrician to turn on the generator if they needed power. While Poloff and FSN were inspecting the generator, the hospital's chief doctor came out and complained angrily to the administrator, saying that he had been performing an emergency operation when the power went out, and the electrician had not arrived until the operation was over. He requested a generator key from the administrator, so that he could turn it on himself, but the administrator placidly told him to bring it up later, and when he was gone, commented to Poloff and FSN that "he's always complaining about something."

15. (SBU) All of the hospitals appeared to value the generators, but made tradeoffs between their effective use

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and keeping them secure. Two of the hospitals had situated the generators appropriately -- far enough away from the hospital building that the noise and the fumes from the generator would not bother patients and staff. The other two had placed the generators immediately adjacent to the hospital, and one of them placed the generator in an inside corner of the U-shaped hospital building, ensuring that the generator exhaust would enter any open hospital windows. When questioned on that point, the hospital administrator said that for security reasons, the generator had to be located there -- otherwise the security guard would not be able to observe it directly, and it might be stolen or vandalized.

Appreciation for U.S. Assistance

16. (SBU) At a ribbon cutting ceremony in the village of Kyzyl Adyr, attended by the regional akim (local government administrator), a deputy oblast governor, local press, and about 30 onlookers, Poloff gave remarks outlining the generator program and past U.S. Government assistance to Kyrgyzstan in the medical field. In their remarks, local officials extolled the generators as an example of the United States' reliability in providing tangible humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan, and also applauded the efforts of a Peace Corps Volunteer working on medical education in the district.

17. (SBU) During the hospital tour following the ceremony, the chief doctor carefully pointed out the hospital's unmet needs, including one place where the building was literally falling apart, and handed us a letter detailing the hospital's budget shortfalls. The officials also asked why some hospitals in the region had received generators, but one had not. The USAID FSN responded that USAID had allocated generators based on a list provided by the Ministry of Health. The group expressed the hope that the remaining hospital would receive a generator in the future.

¶8. (SBU) After the ceremony, the district akim hosted Poloff, FSN and local dignitaries at a cafe. While participants generally deferred to the akim, conversation was boisterous. Asked about local relations with Kazakhstan, the akim replied, with general approbation from the company, that prior to the Soviets' creation of Central Asian nationalities in the early 20th century, all of Kazakhstan had been Kyrgyz.

Other participants chimed in: one claimed that Tashkent had originally been a Kyrgyz city; the Deputy Governor cited a linguistic study showing that the Japanese language was descended from Kyrgyz; and others advanced theories that everyone from Native Americans to Germans had descended from the Kyrgyz. The last proved too much, and a hospital administrator interjected: "No, no, no: I don't mind being related to the Japanese, but not to the Germans!"

¶9. (SBU) Eventually addressing the question at a more prosaic level, the akim said that there were many Kazakhs living in Talas. Aside from a slight variation in language, the difference between Kazakh and Kyrgyz was more a matter of where one happened to live when the borders were drawn, and not so much a question of nationality. The tea-and-fruit-juice meal concluded with a Muslim prayer, and Poloff was impressed by their piety, until he learned that in an aside prior to the meal, the FSN had gently steered the akim away from opening bottles of vodka, with the explanation that "Americans can't drink while on duty."

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